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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM FOR _____

SUBJECT: Reconnaissance

You are familiar with the large gaps in our Intelligence coverage of the Soviet Union which prevent us from obtaining adequate knowledge of Soviet intentions and, in important respects, of Soviet capabilities; and, in particular, with respect to their capabilities and intentions to launch nuclear attacks on the United States. You are familiar, too, with the current and growing difficulties in the way of filling these gaps by the more classic means.

In my considered judgment, as well as that of the other members of the Intelligence Community, there is not the prospect of gaining this vital Intelligence without the conduct of systematic and repeated air reconnaissance over the Soviet Union itself. (Even this does not assure adequacy, but will certainly provide a much closer approach to adequacy.) Thus, there is a definite and urgent National requirement for photographic and electronic reconnaissance overflights of the Soviet Bloc.

Retyped 11/18/54.

While we have been considering the problem for a long time (you may recall a discussion I had with you some months ago concerning overflights), Dr. James R. Killian, Jr., and members of Project 3, Technological Capabilities Panel, Office of Defense Mobilization, (E. H. Land, James G. Baker, Joseph W. Kennedy, Edward M. Purcell and [REDACTED] have independently arrived at essentially the same conclusion. I have also discussed it with General Twining. We are all agreed that the requirement is an urgent one and that with suitable direction and support ~~by you~~, it is feasible of accomplishment with minimum risk.

An existing Air Force aircraft type (the Canberra) is considered capable of modification to give it a ceiling of around 70,000 feet. At such an altitude, the expectation that it would be detected is very low indeed, and the possibility that it would be intercepted and shot down is practically nil. The possibility of forced landing in enemy territory exists, but the chances of that are low. The repercussions of its falling into enemy hands can be mitigated if the aircraft should be manned by non-official U. S. personnel. To the extent practicable, we would try

The aircraft itself, if not completely destroyed, would bear no markings that would clearly identify its origin. The Canberra itself is nearly identical with its British prototype.

Continued
As a ~~backup against failure of the Canberra to attain~~
~~the ceiling desired~~, we would simultaneously proceed with
the procurement of specially designed reconnaissance
aircraft.

In addition to this high altitude day reconnaissance,
we would resort to very low altitude reconnaissance at night
with appropriate aircraft. Whereas the night reconnaissance
would not provide a substitute for the high altitude day
photography, nevertheless it would give an opportunity for
supplementary reconnaissance, exploiting such technical
developments as infrared photography and certain electronics
techniques.

Of course, not even the 70,000 foot opportunity will be
of indefinite duration. Our problem will be one of keeping
ahead and creating new opportunities as the old disappear.

We are all agreed also that, in order to attain a
status of readiness to launch these flights as early as
desired, and then to conduct them, extraordinary procedures
would have to be adopted for aircraft, crew and equipment
procurement, testing, training, and for operations. This
would require the greatest possible collaboration between
the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency, ~~in the~~
~~form of a completely joint enterprise.~~

I recommend that you:

- a. Approve the existence of a National requirement
for the above reconnaissance overflights.

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b. By approval of this document, direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Director of Central Intelligence to establish as a matter of urgency, a ~~joint~~ *collaborative* project for the procurement and testing of the necessary aircraft and equipment, and for the procurement and training of the necessary crews (such crews to be non-U. S. nationals to the extent practicable).

c. By approval of this document, direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Director of Central Intelligence to conduct at the earliest possible date, the reconnaissance overflights, and to do so in such a way as to reduce the risk of involvement of the U. S. to the minimum practicable.

This undertaking has no significant.